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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KREF](#) [KJUS](#) [IO](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: ICRC DISCUSSES DETAINEES, MASS GRAVES, AND THE MEK
WITH AMBASSADOR

REF: A. BAGHDAD 377
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 797

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher R. Hill for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) In a May 19 meeting with the Ambassador and the Embassy's Senior Coordinator for Refugees, ICRC Head of Iraq Delegation Juan Pedro Schaerer provided an overview of the ICRC's activities in Iraq and praised the close cooperation between the organization and the Embassy. Schaerer highlighted the slow progress being made on mass grave identification and excavation within Iraq and the ICRC's efforts to increase the GOI's capacity in this area. Schaerer commended the close working relationship ICRC has developed with Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) on the release and transfer of detainees, noting that MNF-I detention operations were "definitely coming to an end." He noted that the Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS) has the "potential" to accomplish much good in Iraq, and emphasized the need for the IRCS not to split into two organizations, one Iraqi and one Kurd. Finally, Schaerer commented that there is "no good solution" to the Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK) situation, but that Camp Ashraf residents are slowly realizing that their time in Iraq is coming to an end. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) ICRC Head of Iraq Delegation Juan Pedro Schaerer and Protection Coordinator Laurent Saugy met on May 19 with the Ambassador to discuss the scope of ICRC's activities in Iraq. Schaerer reviewed the challenges faced by the organization's Iraq operation, including attacks on its Baghdad office and the 2005 murder of a staff member, which prompted the group's relocation to Amman. Schaerer was hopeful that ICRC's Iraq delegation would soon again be based permanently in Baghdad, and pointed out that there are currently more than 90 international delegates and over 500 ICRC staff members working in every province and major city in Iraq.

Slow Progress on Mass Graves

[1](#)3. (C) Schaerer was concerned at the slow progress on Iraq's identification, excavation and repatriation of remains in mass graves. He noted that there have been "very few results" over the past two years; specifically, out of 1,431 total cases presented from the 1990-1991 Gulf War, 550 Kuwaiti remains have been positively identified. The Ambassador expressed concern at this lack of progress, especially given the international community's resources and experience in this area. Schaerer noted the assistance and training being provided by the International Committee for Missing Persons (ICMP), but was troubled by the lack of communication among various GOI ministries involved in the project. (Note: ICMP is a DRL and United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) grantee. End note.). Resolving the

remaining cases, located in four or five sites, is do-able, but will require additional GOI efforts. Schaerer noted that over 50,000 people remain missing from the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War and an additional 30,000 are unaccounted for since the U.S. 2003 invasion. He was worried that this is "not a priority" for the GOI, and despite the best efforts of the Ministry of Human Rights, it lacks the capacity to tackle a project of this scale.

Shifting the Focus to GOI-Held Detainees

¶4. (C) On detainees, Schaerer praised the much-improved relationship between ICRC and MNF-I. While the two organizations may not always agree with one another, he applauded the "open and constructive way" in which they discussed the release and transfer of USG-held detainees. He also stated that ICRC would be shifting its focus to visiting GOI facilities and GOI-held detainees, now that MNF-I detention operations were "winding down." The Ambassador applauded the ICRC for its work on detainee issues, especially the humanitarian assistance it provides. Schaerer noted how the IRCS worked with MNF-I on releasing detainees in Ninewa and appears set to resume this cooperation. While this is unlikely to be replicated in other provinces, he viewed it as a positive development for the organization. In his view, IRCS has the potential to increase its capacity in Iraq, but he was concerned that the recent indications that the three IRCS branches in Kurdistan seek to separate from the IRCS would splinter Iraq's only nationwide humanitarian organization. Schaerer said that ICRC had

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informed the Kurdish branches that under the rules of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, there could be only one national society.

ICRC Commends Embassy Efforts in Dealing with the MEK

¶5. (C) Regarding the MEK defectors/Camp Ashraf issue, Schaerer was satisfied with the Embassy's procuring of humanitarian assurances from the GOI prior to the official handover of authority last January. Schaerer complimented the way in which the GOI has thus far handled the situation, noting that there was "no good solution" to the problem. MEK members, he believes, are slowly coming to the realization that they may have to leave the camp. The group's leadership, based in Paris, is "not pleased" that ICRC continues to focus its efforts on the protection of individuals as opposed to pressuring the GOI to permit residents to remain at Camp Ashraf, while Iran "just wants the camp closed." (Note: Camp Ashraf is located in Diyala province, approximately 120 miles west of the Iran-Iraq border. End note.).

Increased Capacity at the Ministry of Health

¶6. (C) Schaerer discussed ICRC's relief work, involving delivery of food and medical supplies, including the support of 22 general hospitals in Iraq. While the organization previously was forced to deal directly with each facility, over the past 18 months it has steadily increased its reliance on the Ministry of Health to perform this role. ICRC continues to provide emergency training for medical professionals in Iraq, and currently has teams in Najaf and Sulaymaniyah. Schaerer viewed as positive the GOI's increased requests for training and capacity building and fewer demands for materials.

HILL